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IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECLARATION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF INTOLERANCE AND OF DISCRIMINATION BASED ON RELIGION OR BELIEF

Written statement submitted by the World Union for Progressive Judaism, a non-governmental organization in consultative status (Roster)

The Secretary-General has received the following communication which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[1 March 1991]

1. The World Union for Progressive Judaism wishes to draw the attention of the Commission on Human Rights at its forty-seventh session to the written statement that it submitted, jointly with other NGOs, on 14 January 1988 to the Commission at its forty-fourth session (E/CN.4/1988/NGO/24). In that document, the concluding statements of an international legal conference held at the New York University School of Law on 13-15 April 1986 were quoted. They said, inter alia: "United Nations, organs representative of Member States, accredited observers and other participants in United Nations proceedings should respect the international legal principle proscribing incitement to national, racial, ethnic or religious hatred."

2. The World Union for Progressive Judaism is particularly concerned by the historic Blood Libel Accusation against Jews and the Jewish religion, which was revived at the Commission on Human Rights on 8 February 1991 by a representative of the Syrian Arab Republic, under the guise of anti-Zionism. On that occasion, she launched an appeal for Members of the Commission to read a book in Arabic called The Matza of Zion, published in Syria in 1983 under

the name of the Syrian Defence Minister, Mustafa Tlass. This work purports to prove "the historical reality" of an abject medieval libel that was again used in 1840 against the Jews of Damascus, an event known to historians as "The Damascus Affair".

3. This calumny was condemned by the highest religious authority in the Islamic world of the time, the Caliph and Ottoman Sultan Abdul Mejid, who promulgated a Firman Hatt-i Hümayun on 6 November 1840, which reads:

> "Ignorant people believe that the Jews are in the habit of making human sacrifices in order to use the blood in the (Passover) wafers. The Jews of Rhodes and Damascus, victims of this belief, subjects of our empire, have been persecuted by men of different faith. The calumny invented against the Jews, as well as the renewed violence to which they have been subjected, have come to the attention of our Imperial Throne. However it is not long since Jews of Rhodes, called to Constantinople for judgement, have been found innocent of the accusations which had been levelled at them. Moreover, after investigations made by competent persons in the religious works of that nation it is clear that not only do Jews not use human blood, but they also do not use the blood of animals. One can conclude, then, that the violence to which the Jews have been subjected result from calumny and no more. The love that we have for our subjects extends equally to the Jewish nation... we wish them to enjoy the advantages and privileges accorded to our other subjects by the Hatti-i Serif of Gülhane [1839]." (T. Farfitt, "Montefiore and the Blood Libel of 1840", in Sonia and V.D. Lipman (Eds.), the Century of Moses Montefiore, Oxford, 1985, pp. 132-3.

4. In a "right of reply" of 12 February, and in a circulated letter addressed to the Centre for Human Rights (E/CN.4/1991/80), the Syrian delegation did not disavow their grave allegations concerning Jews and Judaism, but - against all logic - pretended that their representative had only criticized zionism and Zionist racism.

5. It is our considered opinion that, before the end of the forty-seventh session on 8 March 1991, the Commission - or its Chairman - should condemn this vicious libel and blatant incitement to racial, ethnic and religious hatred, which is in contradiction with all the general principles of international law. A failure to do so will leave a serious stigma on the Commission and will affect the authority of the United Nations in the implementation of its programmes for the promotion and protection of human rights. At the same time, a dangerous precedent would have been created that might be followed by similar libels in the future against any religion or ethnic group.

6. The Commission on Human Rights is a body whose role is to uphold fundamental human rights and denounce, inter alia, under art. 20 (2) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, "any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence...".